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ABSTRACT

Following a discussion of means of facilitating community college access for minority students, this paper presents the results of a study conducted at Charles County Community College (CCCC) to develop a recruitment strategy to increase minority enrollments. Introductory material discusses the access to education afforded to minority students by community colleges, and the barriers these students confront when entering a two-year college. The next sections outline obstacles to minority enrollment in vocational programs, trends toward skewed minority enrollment patterns, and recent responses to the problems of unequal access and the underrepresentation of minority students in higher education. Then, results are presented from CCCC's survey of 1,070 high school seniors enrolled in the Charles County public school system. The survey was conducted to obtain information on students' career plans and to compare the plans of minority and white students. Study highlights include: (1) nearly half of the white respondents planned to continue their education, compared to one-third of the minority students; (2) white respondents were willing to train longer in preparation for their career than were minority students; and (3) almost half of the white students and one-third of the minority students viewed CCCC attendance as the first phase of a four-year education. (HB)

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FACILITATING COMMUNITY COLLEGE ACCESS FOR MINORITY STUDENTS

by
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Introduction

Black students who gain access to higher education are often faced with a harrowing experience. These students have tended not to receive support from their secondary schools or their parents. Further, they see little value in vocational education.

Community colleges, too, are not easily accessible for minority students. Although a large number of minority students do attend the two-year segment, they tend to be concentrated in institutions located in urban settings. Educators have called for articulation between high schools and colleges that might aid in the alleviation of these problems.

This paper, in part, describes a joint study conducted by a community college and public school system in a rural area. Perceptual differences about the need for higher education were found between minority and white students. Implications for the recruitment of minority students were discussed.

The entry of the black student into the higher education arena represents to him or her a complex and often harrowing and insensitive process. Most black students entering the community college come from educational and family backgrounds which have provided them with little knowledge or experience and information required for higher education (Cross, 1976).

Barriers to higher education for the majority of black students are often attributed to the home, as a significant number of black students recruited to the community college campus come from a background of poverty, low academic achievement, and frustration (Cross, K.P., 1971; Karabel, J., 1972; & Astin, A.W., 1975, 1982). However, the lack of effective communication between black families and the educational system has resulted in minority parents having difficulty understanding what their role in education should be. The high school is a bewildering and frustrating environment to minority students, in which they generally are placed on their own to seek assistance and information to attain access to college (Johnson, 1982).

For most minority groups and most particularly for blacks, the public schools have provided little opportunity to overcome deficiencies in those skills which are essential for social mobility. The historical fact is that while in school they fall further behind whites in the development of skills, which are crucial to making a living and participating fully in modern society (Moore, 1970, 1980; Boyer, 1983).

Obstacles to Attaining Equality

Minority high school students suffer for lack of effective counseling. Students, whose parents have never attended college, often need more counseling. Often black high school graduates are counseled to pursue post-secondary programs which lead to dead ends, underemployment, and in some cases to no employment (Vetter, 1976). Unfortunately, many black students with above average high school achievement scores tend not to enroll in high technology programs and thus enter college and the work force without adequate knowledge of good career opportunities. Negative stereotypes and a lack of current career information among black high school graduates are seen as significant factors which discourage them in selecting technical programs until after a period of maturity or after failure in the job market (Johnson, 1982). He further notes that black high school graduates have been greatly influenced by the negative stereotypes associated with a vocational education and thereby fail to consider a career in a technical or vocationally-oriented field.

Because vocational education has served the needs of so many kinds of students, and provided job preparation in the semi-skilled trades, the image of vocational education is not always accurately projected to students or to the general public. As a result, many black students have perceptions about vocational education, which have no relevance to the current emphasis on job preparation.

King (1977) observes that black high school students in college preparatory courses perceive that vocational training is a device used to keep blacks out of higher status jobs, and that their parents are more likely to encourage them to attend college than are parents of vocationally enrolled high school students.

Contributing to this state of uncertainty on the part of black students are the misconceptions about a vocationally oriented curriculum, held by the parents, teachers, and counselors who tend to view this curricular activity as a less desirable option. In a number of cases, such a perception has proven to be valid. It has been the practice of some counselors to discourage academically talented black students from entering programs with an emphasis in high technology (Johnson, 1982).

Trends of Minority Enrollment

Students in open enrollment institutions are often burdened with the stresses of poverty (ISEP, 1980; Astin, 1982). A college education is looked upon as a means of escaping the insecurities of unskilled or semi-skilled employment. This predicament places these students in the position of having to make career choices based on inaccurate perceptions and information.

On closer examination, the category of "special" student in the community college setting becomes more normative than atypical. The average age of college students continues to increase. The 1970's witnessed more than 60 percent of high school graduates going directly to college. However, by the middle of the decade only half of the high school graduates who eventually went to college entered immediately after graduation (Astin, 1982).

Nationally, minority students constitute over 25 percent of total community college enrollment (Cohen and Brawer, 1982). While forty percent of ethnic minorities enrolled in college attend community colleges, the majority of this group is black. The pattern of enrollment for this group indicates a continuous period of growth during the past twenty-five years.

While the current data tend to support the removal of barriers of access to public institutions for minority students, it should be interpreted with a major caveat in mind, namely, that they show limited progress and mask the skewing effect within the postsecondary arena (ISEP, 1980). An obvious characteristic of the data is the overwhelming presence of minority students in the urban two-year institutions. The enrollment data in Table 1, as reported by the Maryland State Board for Community Colleges for Fall 1982, indicated significant minority enrollments in two institutions; one, located in Baltimore City and the other near the District of Columbia. Analysis of the data reveals 70.6 percent minority enrollment at the Community College of Baltimore and 35.5 percent at the Prince George's Community College. The statewide average reported for minority enrollment for that period was 18.9 percent.

TABLE 1 - FALL 1982 ENROLLMENT BY RACE FOR SELECTED MARYLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Community College	Black	Total
Community College of Baltimore	6,598	9,930
Prince George's Community College	5,405	15,354
All Others	6,156	76,647
TOTALS	18,159	101,931

This concentration is an important key to understanding minority access into postsecondary education. While minority students tend to be maldistributed throughout the postsecondary hierarchy, they are similarly maldistributed throughout the two year tier. Seven percent of the two-year institutions enroll forty-two percent of the minority two-year students. These 83 urban two-year colleges, which number less than three percent of all postsecondary institutions, enroll nearly twenty-three percent of all undergraduate minority students (Olivas, 1980).

Vigilant efforts have been launched during the past 20 years by civil rights and other public advocacy groups to address the issue of inequitable access to higher education (MALDEF, 1978). A major recommendation put forth by these groups has been to urge multi-unit districts to examine campus locations for disproportional racial impact. In areas where there are institutions not serving minority students, when minority populations are proximate, forces have been mobilized to enjoin these institutions from imposing barriers to admission of minority students.

Response to Dilemma

Since 1978, the Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities has been involved in the task of assessing the educational progress of Blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans,

and American Indians in higher education (Astin, 1982). The findings of this body concur with the theme that the quality of "precollegiate" education is critical in determining whether recent high school graduates go on to college, what kinds of higher education institutions they attend, how they perform in college, and whether they are able to complete their college education.

While there may be disagreement on the causes, most observers agree that in recent years the quality of public school at both the elementary and secondary levels has deteriorated. The quality of academic preparation in secondary schools is a major factor in the student's academic performance in college. Aggregate statistics on test performance and graduation rates for minorities tend to support the fact that the weaknesses of the public education system are borne heavily by minority students (Astin, 1982). This situation is particularly true for those attending predominantly minority institutions located in the inner city and in isolated rural areas.

While recognizing that indifference and hostility to minority concerns have increased in recent years, the Commission felt compelled to offer numerous recommendations. These readdressed inequality in higher education and reexamined current policies and practices which pose special obstacles to the development of minority students.

Minority underrepresentation in higher education is attributed not only to greater than average attrition rates from secondary school and undergraduate college, but also to a disproportionately high dropout rate in the transition from high school to college.

In considering the importance of the minority issue in higher education and the Commission's concern for providing effective counseling and other intervention strategies for minority students, the following recommendations are noted (Astin, 1982):

> That school counselors and teachers make special efforts to assist minority students in understanding the relationship between their education and their future careers and other life options.
>
> That secondary school teachers and administrators working in close collaboration with faculty from nearby colleges, define those competencies that are crucial to effective performance in college and develop tests to measure such competencies. (p. 189).

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Description of the Study

In order to retrieve the necessary data for formulating recruitment strategy, a survey instrument was designed by a task force comprised of staff from Charles County Community College and the Charles County Public School System. The survey was administered to each of the seniors in the four county high schools. A total of 1,070 usable questionnaires was completed by the seniors. The completed questionnaires represent nearly 86 percent of the senior enrollment across all four high schools.

The survey instrument was designed to provide the College with information in a number of areas. However, perhaps the most trenchant area dealt with the career plans of the survey population. Researchers, (e.g., Hillery, 1978) have stated that large numbers of students enroll in post-secondary educational institutions without the benefit of a sound career plan. It is imperative that colleges identify those individuals who fall within this category of students. Further, the Charles County Community College has, for a number of years, been plagued by low minority enrollments. To illustrate, slightly more than 30 percent of the traditional 18-24 year old "college age" cohort in the College's service area is non-white. However, approximately 11 percent of this cohort enrolled at the College is non-white. The instrument, therefore, was designed to measure not only career aspirations of high school seniors, but also any perceptual differences that exist between white and minority students.

The high schools were given the task of administering the survey. The Supervisor of Counseling for the School System coordinated the effort, while it was left to each of the high schools to decide upon the most efficacious way to administer the survey. Survey forms were completed during May 1983 and returned to the College for processing and analysis.

Results

The analysis of the data indicated that there were, in fact, different perceptions between minority and white students. Responses to a series of items from the survey clearly specify these differences. Each of these differences will be presented in the following tables. Respondents indicated future career plans by replying to an item indicating broad categories of options that could be pursued subsequent to graduation. The white students were much more apt to attend a post-secondary institution than were their minority counterparts. Nearly half of the white respondents planned on continuing their educations, whereas only one-third of the minority respondents perceived higher education as a viable option. On the other hand, minority students were much more likely to enlist in the military.

Table 2 shows the number of students planning on pursuing the various career options.

TABLE 2 - PLANS OF RESPONDENTS AFTER GRADUATION

Plans After Graduation	Race		Total
	Minority	White	
Blank	8	18	26
Two-Year College	54	194	248
Four-Year College	46	165	211
Job	100	206	306
Military	54	40	94
Still Planning	38	122	160
Self- Employed	7	18	25
TOTALS	307	763	1,070

$\chi^2 = 53.04$; $p < .01$

As there were differences in the types of activities in which the respondents of different races were interested, there were also differences noted in the length of time to train for a career. Typically, white respondents would be willing to train longer in preparation for their careers. Although the majority of respondents of both races were willing to spend more than two years for initial career development, the percentage among white respondents was, in fact, larger. Further, 13 percent of the minority respondents indicated that they would train for only six months or less.

TABLE 3 - TIME RESPONDENTS ARE WILLING TO TRAIN FOR CAREER

Time to Train	Race		Total
	Minority	White	
Blank	24	54	78
6 Months or Less	40	52	92
One Year	38	91	129
Two Years	79	182	261
Four Years	126	384	510
TOTALS	307	763	1,070

$\chi^2 = 14.31$; $p < .01$

In addition to the somewhat more general questions regarding career plans, respondents were also queried concerning specific perceptions they had of Charles County Community College. Again, there were differences between the two groups of respondents. White students typically viewed the College as the first two years of a four year college education. Although minority students also tended to view the College as the initial phase of a four year educa tion, the percentage was lower in comparison to white respondents. Additionally, a significantly larger percentage of minority respondents felt that the College served the function of providing vocational training. Sadly, small percentages of white and minority students perceive the College as an institution in which they can overcome prior academic difficulties. This sentiment exists despite the fact that the College has recently placed increased emphasis on remediation.

TABLE 4 - RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTION OF CHARLES COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Perceptions	Race		Total
	Minority	White	
Blank	53	111	164
Vocational Institution	67	111	178
First Two Years of a Four-Year college	103	339	442
Personal Enrichment	66	147	213
Overcome Academic Problems	18	55	73
TOTALS	307	763	1,070

$\chi^2 = 15.42$; $p < .01$

It is difficult to assess from where these perceptions of the College are formed. The vast majority of both groups have implied that they have had little contact with the College. Nearly three-fourths of the total study population have never visited the campus. Minority students, however, were more apt to have been at the College than were white respondents. In fact, the analysis indicated a significant difference between minority and white student campus visitation ($\chi^2 = 10.39$; $p < .01$). When respondents were asked whether or not they have spoken to a representative of Charles County Community College, no difference was noted between groups ($\chi^2 = 0.61$; $p > .05$). In fact, only approximately one-third of the respondents from either of the two groups had ever spoken to either a counselor or faculty member from the College.

Discussion

Writers dealing with minority access to the community college (Olivas, 1980) have demonstrated that tracking based on race may exist prior to entrance into higher education. In fact, this may be the case in the Charles County public schools. Many more minority students are enrolled in the business and general curricula, whereas the largest plurality of white students are enrolled in academic programs ($\chi^2 = 54.29$; $p < .01$). However, [illegible] selec-

tive curricular enrollment pattern need not necessarily serve as a deterrent to minority access. The designation "college bound" must be treated as nothing more than a meaningless label used by elitists, and not educators. New strategies for recruitment need to be developed. In fact, these strategies are becoming more apparent.

Boyer (1983) has documented a number of innovative programs where businesses work with students who are educationally disadvantaged. Community colleges must adopt similar strategies. This is not to infer that all minority students are educationally disadvantaged. However, this research has shown that a meaningful percentage of minority students are not interested in transferring to a four-year institution. Community colleges must make more of an attempt to match program offerings with the needs of minority students. The recruitment process has to become a more active endeavor. No longer can recruiters wait until a high school student's senior year before contacting the individual.

An example from this research might help to prove the point:

> Nearly one-third of the minority respondents to the survey indicated that their career plan subsequent to graduation was to get a job. Yet, only 21 percent of these same respondents perceived the College as a place to receive vocational training. (Goldstein, 1983; p.10).

There must be a closer match between minority career plans and strategies taken by a comprehensive community college to help satisfy those plans. In fact, programs offered at a college will meet the need of a vocationally oriented minority student. However, offering relevant programs is not enough. Colleges must provide this information to minority students. This strategy is necessary not only to increase minority access, but also is necessary for the survival of the college.

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